



Department of the Interior Telework Program FAQ

These questions and answers accompany the revised telework program policy for the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department or DOI), effective August 23, 2021. Personnel Bulletin (PB) 21-07 establishes the Departmental policy under which eligible employees may be authorized to telework.

To review the revised telework program policy and other related resources, please visit the Department's telework resources pages available at <https://www.doi.gov/telework>.

If you have any additional questions, please contact your [Bureau/Office Telework Coordinator](#).

Telework Program Policy: General Information

1. What is telework?

The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 defines telework as a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of their position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work. In practice, telework is a work arrangement that allows an employee to perform work, during any part of regular, paid hours, at an approved alternative worksite (e.g., home, telework center, or other approved worksite).

Telework arrangements can benefit the agency and the workforce in several ways: enhance the recruitment and retention of a high-quality, diverse workforce; assist in providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities; ensure the continuity of operations in an emergency; reduce transportation-related costs; improve morale by allowing employees to balance work and personal demands; and facilitate employee productivity toward mission accomplishment.

2. What is a “telework-ready” employee?

A telework-ready employee is an eligible employee who has completed the required telework training, has an approved telework agreement in place, and has the required work necessities (e.g., equipment, materials) to effectively perform their duties at an approved alternative worksite.

3. What are the types of telework arrangements available?

There are two types of telework arrangements at DOI: 1) Core Telework and 2) Situational Telework.

Core telework is an arrangement in which eligible employees telework from an approved alternative worksite on a recurring, scheduled basis—i.e., fixed day(s) per week or pay period. For example, a teleworker with an approved telework arrangement wherein they telework every Wednesday would be considered a core teleworker. The core telework schedule must be documented in the telework agreement and approved by the supervisor.

Situational telework is an arrangement in which eligible employees telework without a set schedule. Examples of situational telework include telework because of inclement weather, personal appointments, and special work assignments. An employee with an approved situational telework arrangement must obtain advance approval from their supervisor for each instance of telework.

Regardless of the type of telework arrangement, an approved telework agreement must be in

place for an employee to telework. Employees are encouraged to work with their supervisors to determine the most effective telework arrangement. The final decision regarding the type of telework arrangement and days an employee is scheduled to telework rests with management.

4. Does an employee have the right to telework?

No. Telework is not a universal employee benefit or an employee right. Federal law requires agencies to establish telework programs but does not give individual employees a legal right to telework.

5. Can an employee be required to telework?

No. The Telework Enhancement Act does not mandate telework—employee participation (i.e., entering into a telework agreement) is voluntary. Accordingly, an employee cannot be made to enter into a telework agreement even if the duties of the position are suitable for telework and the employee is determined eligible to telework. While entering into a telework arrangement is voluntary, once the employee has an approved telework agreement in place, the agency can require the employee to telework in certain situations (e.g., during a pandemic health crisis; during an inclement weather-related office closure; if the employee is subject to an investigation or other administrative action that requires them to be taken out of the workplace).

6. Teleworkers are required to physically report to the official duty station at least two full workdays per bi-weekly period, except for rare circumstances or as a reasonable accommodation. What is an example of a rare circumstance that would exempt a teleworker from reporting to the official duty station two full workdays per pay period?

The temporary exception should generally be used only in cases where (1) the employee is expected to stop teleworking and return to work at the official duty station in the near future, or (2) the employee is expected to continue teleworking but will be able to report to the official duty station at least twice each biweekly pay period on a regular and recurring basis in the near future. Examples of appropriate temporary situations include:

- Recovery from an injury or medical condition;
- Emergency situations preventing an employee from regularly commuting to the official worksite, such as a severe weather emergency or a pandemic health crisis. (For instance, in the aftermath of a hurricane or flood, an employee may be forced to relocate temporarily, making commuting to the regular worksite twice each biweekly pay period on a regular and recurring basis impossible. If the employee is approved to telework, a temporary exception to the twice-a-pay-period requirement would be appropriate.); or
- An extended period of approved absence from work (e.g. paid leave) during which the

employee teleworks periodically.

Telework Eligibility

7. Does telework eligibility determine if a position is suitable for telework or the eligibility of an employee to telework?

The determination regarding the suitability of a position, eligibility of an employee to telework, or approval of an employee's participation in telework resides with management and will be based on the duties of the employee's position, the agency's business needs, and the employee's ability to fulfill their responsibilities as a teleworker.

8. What types of positions are suitable for telework?

The suitability of a position for telework depends on the duties and functions of the position. Positions suitable for telework must have quantifiable, project-oriented, or other portable job tasks that can be performed satisfactorily at the approved alternative worksite (e.g., reading reports, analyzing documents and studies, preparing written documents); limited need for access to classified information; and off-site access to needed technology.

Positions not suitable for telework are those that require on a daily basis (every workday):

- Direct handling of classified or other secure materials determined to be inappropriate for telework by management; or
- On-site activity that cannot be handled remotely or at an alternative worksite (e.g., face-to-face personal contacts; intake or distribution of mail; hands-on contact with machinery, equipment, or vehicles; law enforcement).

When an employee's position is determined not normally suitable for telework, there may be circumstances or portions of the employee's work (e.g., reading and analyzing documents and preparing reports or other types of correspondence, non-classified assignments) that may be considered for telework on a situational basis if the supervisor deems it to be in the best interest of the agency.

9. My position has been determined suitable for telework. Does that mean I am automatically eligible for telework?

Not necessarily. Once a position is determined suitable for telework, the supervisor must determine the employee's eligibility to telework. To be considered eligible for telework, an employee must demonstrate characteristics indicating their ability to effectively work away from the official worksite. Employees eligible for telework must display dependability, responsibility, and conscientiousness; the ability to work independently and without close supervision; self-motivation and self-discipline; and the ability to prioritize work and manage time wisely.

10. Are there circumstances under which an employee must be determined ineligible to telework on a permanent basis?

The Telework Enhancement Act identifies two categories of employees who are not eligible to telework: an employee who has been officially disciplined for being **absent without permission (AWOL) for more than five days in any calendar year**; and an employee who has been officially disciplined for violations of subpart G of the Standards of Ethical Conduct of Employees of the Executive Branch **for reviewing, downloading or exchanging pornography, including child pornography, on a Federal computer or while performing Federal Government duties.**

The period of ineligibility for employees who have been officially disciplined for the type of misconduct above depends on the type of action taken and whether a non-permanent or permanent record of the discipline is filed in the employee's electronic official personnel folder (eOPF). For non-permanent records (e.g., reprimand), the prohibition from telework exists until the document is removed. For permanent records (e.g., personnel actions documenting suspensions), the prohibition is permanent.

11. What other circumstances make an employee ineligible to telework?

In addition to the circumstances listed in Question 10, employees are ineligible to telework if:

- Their conduct has resulted in an official disciplinary action taken against them (e.g., written reprimand, suspension, removal, reduction in grade/pay) for any type of misconduct. Disciplined employees may remain ineligible to telework for a maximum of two years from the effective date of the official disciplinary action. When disciplined employees become eligible for telework, supervisors, after consultation with the servicing Human Resources Office, may allow disciplined employees to telework or may continue periods of telework ineligibility until a future date.
- They have received less than a Fully Successful performance rating at any time during the rating period or been notified in writing of less than Fully Successful performance (e.g., by receipt of a Notice of Opportunity to Demonstrate Acceptable performance). On a case-by-case basis, employees who are formally notified during the performance year that their performance has improved to the Fully Successful level may resume teleworking, if the supervisor deems telework to be in the best interest of the agency.

12. If an employee's position is determined to be suitable for telework and the employee is eligible to participate, can the employee be required to telework even though they have indicated a desire not to telework?

No. An employee's "eligibility" for telework does not create a right or obligation for an employee to "participate" in telework. The fact that an employee may be deemed "eligible" does not mean

that the employee can be required to "participate" because telework is a voluntary workplace flexibility. In other words, an agency may not mandate an employee to telework, even if the duties of the position make that employee "telework eligible." Keep in mind that although entering into a telework arrangement is voluntary, once the employee has an approved telework agreement in place, the agency can require the employee to telework in certain situations (e.g., if the employee is subject to an investigation or other administrative action that requires them to be taken out of the workplace; during a pandemic health crisis; during an inclement weather-related office closure).

Establishing a Telework Arrangement

13. What is required for an employee to begin teleworking?

If it is determined that telework is a viable option and in the best interest of the agency, the supervisor and the employee must complete the required training and execute a telework agreement before initiating a telework arrangement. The required training courses for supervisors and employees are available via the Department's electronic talent management system, DOI Talent:

- For employees: "Telework Fundamentals – Employee Training"
- For supervisors: "Telework Fundamentals – Manager Training"

Once the required training is completed, a telework agreement (Form DI-3457) must be completed by the supervisor and employee before the employee can be permitted to telework. The telework agreement documents the terms and conditions of the telework arrangement, including the type of telework arrangement approved and the particular days for which the employee is approved to telework, if applicable, and includes a safety checklist for the employee to use in assessing the overall safety of the alternative worksite. The final decision regarding the type of telework arrangement and days an employee is scheduled to telework rests with management.

14. Am I required to complete the "Telework Fundamentals" training annually?

No. Completion of the telework training is a one-time requirement. Once completed, employees and supervisors do not need to repeat the training for the purposes of telework. If employees or supervisors have documentation demonstrating they completed previous training titled "Telework 101 for Employees," or "Telework 101 for Supervisors," or equivalent training, they do not need to complete these courses.

15. I have been assigned a new supervisor. Does my new supervisor have to honor my current telework agreement?

No. Consistent with Departmental policy, a new telework agreement form must be initiated when

an employee is assigned a new supervisor or a new position. A new telework agreement form must also be initiated to document approved changes to the employee's telework arrangement (e.g., change in approved core telework days, change in type of telework arrangement). The determination regarding the approval of a telework arrangement rests with management. Existing telework agreements may be subject to change based on the new supervisor's assessment of the employee's eligibility to telework and/or the suitability of the employee's position for telework.

16. If a supervisor denies an employee's telework agreement, can the employee grieve that decision?

Yes. Employees may grieve the denial of telework or the termination of an existing telework agreement via applicable grievance procedures.

17. Once approved, does a telework agreement need to be reviewed periodically?

Yes. Consistent with the Departmental telework program policy, telework agreements must be reviewed by the supervisor and teleworker on an annual basis to be revalidated, revised, or terminated as appropriate. During this annual review and recertification, the supervisor must verify that the employee is still eligible to participate in telework (e.g., review the employee's most recent performance rating to ensure that is at least Fully Successful). The annual review and recertification must occur on or before the one-year anniversary date that the telework agreement was originally approved. Failure to complete the annual recertification requirement may result in the termination of the telework agreement.

Teleworking from the Approved Alternative Worksite

18. Employees are required to report to the official duty station at least two times a pay period. If an employee reports to the official duty station for two hours and teleworks the rest of the workday, does that comply with this requirement?

No. The Departmental telework program policy establishes the requirement that an employee approved to telework must physically report to their official duty station **at least two full workdays per bi-weekly pay period**, except for rare circumstances or as a reasonable accommodation. In other words, the expectation is that the employee will be physically present at the official duty station for a complete tour of duty at least two days per pay period.

19. Are teleworkers also eligible for an alternative work schedule?

Yes. Telework is compatible with standard and alternative work schedules (e.g., flexible work schedules, compressed work schedules). Bureaus/Offices may not establish implementing procedures prohibiting a teleworker from having an alternative work schedule.

20. Is an employee entitled to an "in lieu of telework day" if the employee is required

to report to the official duty station on their scheduled telework day?

If a supervisor requires a teleworker to report to the employee’s official worksite on a scheduled telework day, the supervisor may approve the employee’s request to switch their scheduled telework day to a different day during that pay period—however, the supervisor is not obligated to do so.

21. Does having a dependent in the home while teleworking violate the telework program policy?

Not necessarily. While telework is not a substitute for dependent care, it can be a very valuable flexibility to employees with caregiving responsibilities. While the presence of dependents in the home is not an absolute bar to teleworking, employees cannot engage in dependent care activities while performing official work duties and are responsible for securing appropriate arrangements for any dependents who are unable to care for themselves independently. This does not preclude a teleworker from having a caregiver in the home who provides care to the dependent(s) while the employee teleworks, provided the arrangement does not disrupt the employee’s ability to telework effectively. Also, a dependent may be permitted in the home, provided they do not require constant supervision or care (e.g., older child or adolescent) and their presence does not disrupt the employee’s ability to telework effectively.

22. An employee is currently on a core telework agreement that allows them to telework each Monday. They have recently been assigned a project and would like to telework a few extra days this week. Do they need to submit a new telework agreement?

No. However, requests by the employee to change their scheduled telework day(s) in a particular week or biweekly pay period must be submitted in advance and approved by the supervisor. A permanent change in the telework arrangement requires a new telework agreement to be executed.

23. How should I code my hours of telework on my timesheet?

Provided below are the telework indicator codes to use when recording hours of telework on one’s timesheet.

For Core Telework, the following codes should be used when:

Type of Telework Indicator Code	Description
A - Frequent Regular Telework Center	Employee teleworks from an established telework center <i>at least 3 days per pay period</i> on a regular, recurring basis.

B - Frequent Regular Alternate TeleworkCenter	Employee teleworks from a work site other than an established telework center at least 3 days per pay period on a regular, recurring basis.
C - Frequent Regular Employee Home	Employee teleworks from home at least 3 days per pay period on a regular, recurring basis
D - Regular Telework Center	Employee teleworks from an established telework center 1 - 2 days per pay period on a regular, recurring basis
E - Regular Alternate Telework Center	Employee teleworks from a work site other than an established telework center 1 - 2 days per pay period on a regular, recurring basis
F - Regular Employee Home	Employee teleworks from home 1 - 2 days per pay period on a regular, recurring basis

For Situational Telework, the following codes should be used when:

Type of Telework Indicator Code	Description
G - Periodic Telework Center	Employee teleworks from established telework center on a situational basis with supervisor approval.
H - Periodic Alternate Telework Center	Employee teleworks from a work site other than an established telework center on a situational basis with supervisor approval.
I - Periodic Employee Home	Employee teleworks from home on a situational basis with supervisor approval

24. May I telework from a location other than the location approved in my telework agreement?

Employees can only have one official approved telework agreement at one time. If an employee wishes to work from more than one alternate location, the employee must notify the supervisor in writing (email is appropriate) about the second alternative location and confirm whether the second alternative location meets the safety checklist requirements and has the proper technology to allow the employee to telework seamlessly. As long as the supervisor approves, the employee may telework from more than one alternative location. It's important to note that to be considered telework, the employee must report to their official duty station at least twice a bi-weekly pay period, except for rare circumstances or as a reasonable accommodation.

Telework During Emergency or Closure Situations

25. If Federal offices are closed due to inclement weather or some other emergency, are teleworkers excused from work as well?

No. In the event the official worksite is closed due to an inclement weather event or other emergency condition (e.g., building fire), telework-ready employees must telework each regularly scheduled workday during the emergency situation. As such, telework-ready employees must prepare to telework when a weather or emergency event is forecasted or anticipated (e.g., a major snowstorm is predicted) by bringing home any necessary equipment (e.g., laptop computer) and work files. To the extent that an employee is unable to telework because they failed to make necessary preparations for reasonably anticipated conditions, the employee must use appropriate paid leave, paid time off, or leave without pay. In the event the employee is prevented from safely teleworking from the approved alternative worksite due to conditions related to the emergency (e.g., weather-related damage that makes occupying the employee's home telework site unsafe, loss of electrical power or internet service, evacuation by local authorities), the supervisor may, at their discretion, grant weather and safety leave consistent with Departmental policy.

26. Can teleworkers be granted weather and safety leave?

Employees with an approved telework agreement (i.e., "telework-ready employees") who are able to safely travel to and work at an approved telework site cannot be granted weather and safety leave. Telework-ready employees must telework, take other leave (paid or unpaid), or paid time off, unless one of the following exceptions applies:

- **Unexpected event.** A telework-ready employee may be granted weather and safety leave if, in the judgment of the supervisor, the employee could not have reasonably anticipated the severe weather or emergency condition and therefore did not take home needed equipment or work. (For example, the weather forecast changes dramatically during the weekend, so an employee cannot reasonably be expected to have known that they would need to telework on Monday.)
- **Unsafe telework site.** A telework-ready employee who is prevented from safely working at the telework site as a result of the severe weather or emergency event (e.g., flooding at the telework site) may be granted weather and safety leave.

However, if the conditions do not prevent the employee from safely traveling to or safely performing work at the official worksite, even if the affected day is a scheduled telework day, the employee cannot be granted weather and safety leave.

27. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has issued an early departure announcement due to inclement weather. In this case, is the expectation that anyone with an approved telework agreement will leave the office, go home, and telework for the remainder of the workday?

Employees with an approved telework agreement working in the office when an early departure is announced generally may receive weather and safety leave only for the period it takes to commute home. Once they arrive home, these employees are expected to complete the

remaining time in their workday by teleworking or taking appropriate paid leave, paid time off, or leave without pay, unless the employee is prevented from safely working at home due to circumstances arising from the event that necessitated the early dismissal. If this is the case, the supervisor may, at their discretion, grant weather and safety leave for the remainder of the workday consistent with Departmental policy.

Employees who were already teleworking when an early departure announcement is made are expected to continue to telework for the remainder of the workday.

28. The regular worksite is closed due to inclement weather. An employee cannot transport their three-year-old to daycare, and the child is at home. May the employee telework?

Employees cannot personally care for a dependent while teleworking and are responsible for securing appropriate arrangements for any dependents who are unable to care for themselves. If a teleworker cannot arrange for appropriate dependent care because of the weather or emergency event affecting the official worksite, any time spent providing personal care to dependents cannot be considered hours of work. The employee is expected to accurately account for work and non-work hours during their tour of duty and to take the appropriate leave (paid or unpaid) to account for any time spent away from normal work-related duties during their scheduled tour of duty. Weather and safety leave may not be granted for this purpose.

Supervising a Teleworker

29. Can I require employees who telework to document their work assignments when working from the telework site?

Performance standards and management expectations for teleworking employees must be the same as the performance standards for non-teleworking employees. Like non-teleworking employees, teleworkers are held accountable for the results they produce. The Telework Enhancement Act contains specific language that clearly states teleworkers and non-teleworkers are to be treated the same for the purposes of:

- Periodic appraisals of job performance;
- Training, rewarding, reassigning, promoting, reducing in grade, retaining, and removing employees;
- Work requirements; or
- Other acts involving managerial discretion.

30. Can a supervisor deny a request to telework or terminate an existing telework agreement?

Yes. Telework is not a universal employee benefit or an employee right. Accordingly, management may deny an employee's request to telework or terminate an existing telework agreement. Decisions to deny or terminate a telework agreement must be based on mission-related reasons and what is

in the best interest of the agency (e.g., telework arrangement fails to meet organizational needs; employee's performance does not comply with terms of telework agreement; staffing issues lead to inadequate office coverage)—and not for personal reasons. The rationale for the denial or termination will be documented in writing on the telework agreement form (Form DI-3457) and provided to the employee. However, please note, if, after approving an employee's location or relocation to a remote worksite, the agency later directs the employee to move to another official worksite outside of the employee's commuting area (e.g., return to a DOI-approved worksite) for reasons unrelated to poor performance or misconduct, the agency may be required to cover applicable expenses such as moving expenses if the employee accepts the directed reassignment.

31. What does teleworking offer me, the supervisor?

A successful telework program can improve organizational efficiency, raise the quality and quantity of work, boost employee morale and job satisfaction, and lower employee turnover rate.

32. Do I have to manage a teleworker differently than the non-teleworkers on my staff?

No. It is important to note that performance standards for teleworking employees must be the same as performance standards for non-teleworking employees. Management expectations for performance should be clearly addressed in the employee's performance plan, and the performance plan should be reviewed to ensure the standards do not create inequities or inconsistencies between teleworking and non-teleworking employees. Like non-teleworking employees, teleworkers are held accountable for the results they produce. Each employee should be appraised against their performance standards, regardless of location.

33. How will I know my employees are available when needed?

The telework agreement provides the framework for the discussion that needs to take place between the supervisor and the employee about expectations. Supervisors are responsible for establishing and communicating clear expectations regarding the telework arrangement including methods of communication (e.g., customer service time frames for returning phone calls, email communication), meeting attendance, duty hours, and procedures for requesting leave while teleworking. For all types of telework, this discussion is important to ensure that employees understand the supervisor's expectations concerning maintaining communication with the office and what will be done to meet contingencies. If the teleworker's presence is needed in the office, they may be required to report to the office on a scheduled telework day.

34. How does a supervisor ensure the alternative work location for a teleworker is safe, and how is a claim for injury handled?

It is the employee's responsibility to ensure the alternative worksite is a safe, hazard-free work environment conducive for the performance of one's official duties. The telework agreement (Form DI-3457), which must be in place before an employee can telework, includes a safety checklist for employee use to certify the overall safety of the alternative worksite. In addition, management maintains the right to make on-site inspections of the employee's telework site. Such inspections will be by appointment during the teleworker's normal tour of duty and with advance notice of at least 24 hours.

Teleworkers may be covered by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act for an on-the-job injury or occupational illness sustained while conducting official Government business at the approved alternative worksite. Employees must inform their immediate supervisor of any on-the-job injury or

occupational illness sustained at the approved alternative worksite at the earliest time possible. Accidents and on-the-job injuries must be reported using the Safety Management Information System to enable Bureau/Office Safety Managers to track and report incidents. Teleworkers must also visit the Department of Labor's Employees' Compensation Operations & Management Portal to file a workers' compensation claim with the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs.

35. An employee who is eligible to telework has indicated that they do not wish to telework. Is the supervisor required to document the employee's decision?

No. As telework is a voluntary workplace flexibility, an employee may elect not to enter into a telework agreement even if they are eligible to telework and occupy a position suitable for telework. Accordingly, the Departmental telework program policy does not require an employee to document their wish not to telework.

Other Workplace Flexibilities that are not Telework

36. What is "Mobile Work"?

Mobile work is work that is characterized by routine and regular travel to conduct work in customer or other worksites as opposed to a single authorized alternative worksite. Examples of mobile work include site audits, site inspections, investigations, property management, and work performed while commuting, traveling between worksites, or on Temporary Duty (TDY). This category of work is not considered telework and is not covered by the Departmental telework program policy.

37. What is "Remote Work"?

Remote work is an arrangement under which an employee is scheduled to perform work **within or outside the local commuting area** of an agency worksite and is not expected to report to an agency worksite on a regular and recurring basis. For a remote worker, the approved remote worksite is the employee's official duty station for pay purposes, even if that location is their home. This category of work is not considered telework and is not covered by the Departmental telework program policy.

38. What is the difference between telework and remote work?

The key difference between a telework and remote work arrangement is how the official duty station is determined for the employee. For a teleworker, the official duty station is the **agency worksite**—the DOI-owned/leased worksite where the employee must physically report at least two full workdays per bi-weekly pay period. For a remote worker, the **approved remote worksite** (e.g., their home) is the employee's official duty station. This distinction is important because a remote worker receives locality pay and other entitlements based on the approved remote worksite.

If you have any additional questions, please contact your [Bureau/Office Telework Coordinator](#).